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SUBJECT: CUBAN INMATES DECRY LACK OF MEDICAL CARE, FRESH AIR

Classified By: COM Michael Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

11. (C) In a relatively rare move, Cuba's Foreign Ministry has accepted and promised to respond to a letter from prisoners denouncing conditions at Kilo 5 prison in Pinar del Rio. The letter, dated November 1, was written by a common prisoner, Nestor Hernandez Escalona, and signed by 13 others, three of them political prisoners. The letter accuses Cuban authorities of denying inmates medical care and states that some have been waiting years for operations. Access to fresh air is "shamelessly" restricted, the letter says, with yard time available only on Thursdays and Fridays for less than one hour. A copy of the letter was shared with us on November 13 by Alejandrina Garcia de la Riva, wife of Diosdado Gonzalez Marrero, who signed the note and is among the 75 peaceful activists imprisoned in the March 2003 crackdown. A clerk at the Foreign Ministry signed a copy of the letter and promised a response. (Note: Garcia de la Riva told us that guards at Kilo 5 are pitting "privileged" inmates against her husband, who is attempting to be moved to a different cell block. End Note.)

12. (C) Other sources have borne witness to the continuing suffering at Cuban prisons. Oswaldo Paya, Christian Liberation Movement (MCL) leader, on November 7 quoted the MCL's Luis Enrique Ferrer as saying that at his prison, Mar Verde in Santiago, water for bathing has been unavailable for nearly a month. At Camaguey's Kilo 7 prison, Paya said, unhygienic conditions are worsening the health of MCL member Alfredo Pulido Lopez, who has lost weight and is suffering from stomach, respiratory and cardiac ailments. Ana Aguililla, wife of Cuba's longest-serving political prisoner, Francisco Chaviano Gonzalez, told us November 9 that her husband, already ailing from a lung tumor, has developed a second tumor in his other lung, and that it seems to have metastasized. (Note: Aguililla also said State Security has set up a new post on her block, inside a daycare center, to better monitor those who visit her home. End Note.)

COMMENT

13. (C) We have seen no significant change in prison conditions since the July 31 "proclamation" that handed power to Gen. Raul Castro. It would be a mistake to think that political prisoners are the only ones suffering behind bars; less than 315 political prisoners and detainees are documented in Cuba, out of a total prison population of between 80,000 and 100,000. Martha Beatriz Roque told P/E Counselor last week that guards rammed a truncheon up a 26-year-old common prisoner's anus and ruptured his bladder and intestines. There is little doubt, however, that political inmates are targeted for special (mis)treatment, particularly those who refuse to wear a prison uniform or

attend reeducation classes. Beatings and stints in "punishment cells" are common. The Foreign Ministry's decision to accept the letter from inmates at Kilo 5 probably stems from the fact that its accusations are relatively modest, and the GOC may see some public relations angle.

PARMLY